

Prospectus for
the 850th Anniversary of Shinran Shonin's Birth and
the 800th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching

The year 2023 will mark the 850th anniversary of the birth of Shinran Shonin, the founder of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist tradition, and the following 2024 will be the 800th anniversary of the establishment of the teaching. Accordingly in 2023, the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha Buddhist organization will observe commemorative services for those occasions.

As a human, it is our nature to see things through a self-centered viewpoint, and that is why our life is filled with suffering. Buddhism is the wisdom that guides us to living in a way that transcends suffering. Amida Buddha is the one who continuously calls out to us saying, "I accept you as you are. I will never abandon you. Remember that I am always with you no matter how sad and lonely you may feel." This message from Amida takes the form as the Buddha's Name, *Namo Amida Butsu*. By frankly listening to that message just as it is, without any calculation, we naturally come to entrust ourselves to the Buddha's guidance, and this entrusting heart enables us to become settled, allowing us to feel confident, safe, and able to cope with any situation. Furthermore, this settled mind becomes the spiritual foundation that facilitates our ability to stand up to and endure various hardships we experience in this world. As our expression of gratitude and indebtedness for that benevolence, we recite the Buddha's Name, and this recitation is called *nembutsu*. Shinran Shonin is the one who detailed how Amida Buddha's salvific compassion reaches and works on us, as well as concretely presented how we should live as a Jodo Shinshu or Nembutsu follower in this world. Thus, he established the teaching doctrinally as well as spiritually, and this is the significance of the establishment of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism by Shinran Shonin.

More than 2,500 years ago, Sakyamuni Buddha awakened to the truth of this world and human beings, that is, the principles of impermanence and dependent origination. They lead us to the principle of 'no-self,' which explains that nothing in this universe has its own unchangeable and original substance. Despite this fact, we cannot detach ourselves from the illusionary 'self' that our own relentless human desires create. As a result, we bring suffering to ourselves and cause hostilities to erupt in the world. This is the universal reality that remains true even in today's world.

Approximately 800 years ago, Shinran Shonin deeply looked into himself and became aware through his own experiences that we cannot free ourselves from our blind passions, that is, our self-promoting way of thinking. However, he also encountered Amida Buddha's aspiration, which the Buddha pledges to guide everyone to realization, leaving no one behind. Shinran Shonin expressed his appreciation for the Buddha's boundless compassion through the way he lived his life, and we should follow his example for living our own. The dual commemorative services will be conducted in the spirit of expressing our gratitude for his guidance, as well as our joy of encountering the Jodo Shinshu teaching.

Today, many nations and communities are placing importance only on their own economic growth and cultural standards, and this tendency has brought about a tenacious atmosphere of exclusiveness, intolerance, and even hostility to the international society, resulting in a variety of

violent conflicts. On the individual level as well, under the pretext of self-effort and self-accountability, people's sense of beneficial coexistence is diminishing and being disregarded, causing the feelings of loneliness and isolation to spread. Thus, what prevails in the contemporary world is a sense of despair that drives us to self-destruction. Under such circumstances, it is the responsibility and obligation of every religious leader and organization to bring that inclination to a halt and turn it in the opposite direction, toward building a harmonious society. However, traditional religious orders not only in Japan, but also in many other places in the world, have not been able to fully respond to people's needs. Unfortunately, we are seeing many followers distancing themselves from those religions.

In light of this situation, it is now more than ever imperative that we recognize our responsibility as a community of Nembutsu followers who endeavor to walk in harmony with everyone by upholding the fundamental concepts of the Buddha Dharma, and strive for the realization of a society in which everyone can live a life of spiritual fulfillment.

Now we would like to conclude this message with the following words of Shinran Shonin, "May there be peace in the world, and may the Buddha's teaching spread." Keeping this in our minds, let us move forward steadily to fulfill our responsibility.

August 2019

Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha Buddhist organization
Ryukokuzan Hongwanji

In celebrating the Joint Celebration

Welcoming members and newcomers alike

It is our hope that the Joint Celebration will be a prime opportunity in leaving a lasting impression on those encountering Buddhism and the Jodo Shinshu teaching for the first time as well as the younger generation.

Fruitful propagation

The Dharma or Ultimate Truth, is timeless. The words used to express and convey the teaching however, are ever-changing. Words play a vital role in propagating the Jodo Shinshu teaching. Therefore, it is critical that our means to communicate the teaching be reviewed carefully and constantly.

Our Pledge / Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching

Composed in 2018 by Monshu OHTANI Kojun, “Our Pledge” presents Buddhism and the Jodo Shinshu tradition in a familiar and understandable way not only to sangha members, but also to newcomers and the younger generation alike.

Furthermore, a dharma message sharing the essence of the Jodo Shinshu teaching was presented during the annual Commemorative Service of the Establishment of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching in April 2021. Its English translation “In Appreciation of the Jodo Shinshu Teaching” was shared and arranged by the English-speaking overseas districts and renamed as “Gratitude for the Jodo Shinshu Teaching.”

It is our hope that these dharma expressions will be recited by many during various occasions in commemoration of the Joint Celebration.

Sensitivity as a religious institute

Living the life of the Nembutsu entails the Mahayana Buddhist principle of harmonious coexistence of all living beings. In this respect, having encountered the salvific working of Amida Buddha we must share in the sorrow and suffering of others. In so doing, let us renew our efforts in contributing to society.

Promotion of Social activities

We shall continue with our ongoing social campaigns: peace education, alleviation of poverty, and participating in the action plans for SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), a set of goals developed in 2015 by the United Nations. With the aim of the movement being that “no one is left behind,” it is in accordance with the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha that it is only natural for us to support the campaign.